

FAINTNESS AND REFRESHING

NO. 3110

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*“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat
forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”
1 Kings 19:8*

[An exposition of the greater part of the chapter from which the text is taken is given with sermon #2828.]

I. MY first observation upon this passage is that THE GREATEST BELIEVERS ARE SOMETIMES SUBJECT TO FAINTING FITS.

The apostle James tells us that “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are,” and this fact was made very clearly manifest on the occasion to which our text refers. Otherwise he seemed, in most things, to be superior to the ordinary run of men, a sort of iron prophet—what if I call him THE PROPHET OF FIRE—the man whose whole life seemed to be a flash of flame—a mighty, burning, ecstatic love and zeal towards the cause of God?

But Elias had his flaws, even as the sun has its spots. Strong man though he was, he was sometimes obliged to faint, even as the sun sometimes suffers an eclipse. His fainting too, took a form which is very common amongst the saints of God, he cried, “O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” [See sermon #2725, ELIJAH FAINTING].

A desire to depart, when it arises from wisdom and knowledge, and from a general survey of things below, is very proper, but when a wish to die is merely the result of passion, a sort of quarreling with God as a child sometimes quarrels with its parents, it has more of folly in it than of wisdom, and much more of petulance than of piety.

It was a remarkable thing that the man who was never to die, for whom God had ordained an infinitely better lot, the man who was to be carried to heaven by a whirlwind, in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire—the man who, like Enoch, was “translated that he should not see death”—should thus pray to die.

We have here a memorable proof that God does not always answer prayer literally, though He always does in effect. He gave Elias something better than that for which he asked, so He really did hear and answer his prayer. But it was strange that Elijah should have asked to die, and blessedly kind was it on the part of our heavenly Father that He did not take His servant at his word, and snatch him away at once, but spared him, that he might escape the sharpness of death.

There is, beloved, a limit to the doctrine of the prayer of faith. We are not to expect that God will give us everything for which we choose to ask. We know that we sometimes ask, and do not receive because we “ask amiss.”

If we ask contrary to the promises of God—if we run counter to the spirit which the Lord would have us cultivate—if we ask anything contrary to His will, or to the decrees of His providence—if we ask merely for the gratification of our own ease, and without an eye to His glory, we must not expect that we shall receive, yet, when we ask in faith, nothing doubting, if we receive not the precise thing asked for, we shall receive an equivalent, and more than an equivalent for it. As one remarks, “If the Lord does not pay in silver, He will in gold, and if He does not pay in gold, He will in diamonds. If He does not give you precisely what you ask for, He will give you that which is more than tantamount to it, and that which you will greatly rejoice to receive in lieu thereof.”

However, Elijah's faintness took this particular form of a desire to die, nor is this very uncommon, especially among the hard worked and most eminent servants of God.

This fainting fit is easily to be accounted for. *It was the most rational thing in the world* for Elijah to be sick at heart, and to desire to die. Can you not see him standing alone upon Mount Carmel? There are the priests of Baal surrounding the altar, they wax warm with excitement, they cut themselves with knives and lancets, but all in vain, then, with laughter and irony, the prophet bids them cry aloud to their absent or sleeping god, Baal, and by and by the solemn testing time comes, he bids them pour water on his altar and into the trench around it, and over the bullock and the wood on which it was laid.

There he stands, a lonely man believing in the invisible God, and believing that the invisible God can do what the visible Baal cannot do. He puts the whole matter to this one test, "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God." Great must have been the excitement of his flaming soul. If one could have felt his mighty heart beating just then, one might have wondered that his ribs could hold so marvelous an enigma,

When "the fire of the LORD fell," conceive, if you can, his holy rapture, his delirious joy, and think of him in the fury of the moment, when he cried, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape" [See sermon #1058, No Quarter], And when he took them down to the brook Kishon, and with his own hands, began the slaughter of the men condemned by the Mosaic law to die because they had perverted the people of Israel from the worship of the Most High God.

And now do you see him as he goes to the top of Carmel, and engages in prayer? He has conquered God once by bringing down fire from heaven, he has overcome Baal and his prophets, and left their dead bodies, heaps upon heaps, by the brook's side. Now he goes up to conquer heaven once more, by asking not for fire, but for water.

He prays, and seven times he bids his servant go and look for the answer. At last, a little cloud is discerned, the heavens begin to blacken, Elijah sends his servant to tell Ahab the king that the rain is coming, and then he girds up his loins, and runs before the king's chariot as though he were as young of heart and as active of limb as ever.

With such a hard day's work, such stern mental toil, such marvelous spiritual exercises, is it a wonder that the man's reason did not reel, but instead thereof, there came on that reaction which, as long as we are mortal men, must follow strong excitement, he now feels depressed and heavy, and a woman's threat crows him who could not once have been cowed by armed hosts.

He who looked to heaven, and was not afraid of all its fires, is now afraid of Jezebel because she swears that she will put him to death. It is not marvelous that it should have been so, for it is just like human nature. Peter is so bold that he cuts off the ear of Malchus, and yet, when a little maid comes in and accuses him of being a friend of Jesus, he denies it with oaths and curses. The boldest sometimes tremble, and it may easily be accounted for on natural principles.

Do you notice *how very opportunely these fainting fits come?* Elijah did not faint when God's honor was at stake at the top of the mountain. There he stands, as if nothing could move him. He did not faint when it was the time to slay the priests of Baal. With quick eye and strong limb, he dashes at them, and accomplishes his mighty victory. He did not faint when it was time to pray, who ever does faint on his knees? But he does faint when it is all over, and when it does not much matter whether he does faint or not. There is no particular reason why he should not, he may well learn more of God's strength and of his own weakness, he may well be laid aside now that his work is done.

Have you never noticed, dear friends, that God wisely times the seasons when He allows you to fall into depression of spirits? He does not touch the sinew of your thigh while you are wrestling with the angel, He makes you limp when the victory is over, but not till then. "I thank God," many a Christian may say, "that when I have been cast down and dispirited, it was at a time when it did not work such fatal mischief to me, and to the cause of God, as it would have done if it had occurred at another season."

Is not the promise, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be,” a very suggestive one? When you have a heavy day’s work to do, you will have the needed strength, but when you have a day of rest, you will have no strength to waste. There shall be no vigor given to spend upon our own pride, or to sacrifice to our own glory. The battle is fought, and then the strength to fight it is taken away, the victory is won, and therefore the power to win it is removed, and God’s servant is made to go and lie down and sleep under a juniper tree, which was, perhaps, the best thing he could do.

And these fainting fits, to which God’s children are subject, *though evil in themselves, prevent greater evils*. Elijah would have been something more than a man if he had not felt conceited and proud, or at least, if there had not been in him a tendency to elation of spirit, when he thought of the greatness and the splendor of the deeds he had wrought.

Who amongst us, at any rate, could have borne so much honor as God put upon him without lifting our heads to the very stars? So he is made to faint. He is constrained now to admit, what I am sure he always knew and felt in his heart, that all the glory must be given to God, and not to the poor frail instrument which He was pleased to use. Graciously did God send this fainting fit to check him in what would have involved him in a far more serious fall.

This depression of spirits, doubtless, *taught Elijah a great lesson*. It needed strong teaching to instruct him. Elias was not a man to be taught by ordinary teachers. If he could have walked into a place where others of God’s servants were ministering, I think they would all have sat down and said, “Let Elias speak, who amongst us can teach him?” The mightiest of God’s servants might be silent before him, and therefore God Himself teaches him.

Some servants of the Lord are taught by God in a way which is quite unknown to others. There is a path which the eagle’s eye hath not seen, and which the lion’s whelp hath not traveled—a path of secret chastisement, as well as of secret revelation. Those whom God honors in public, He often chastens in private, those men who shine most as candles of the Lord’s own right-hand lighting, are sometimes made to feel that they would be but a snuff if the grace of God should depart from them. God has ways of teaching all of us in our bones and in our flesh, but He specially knows how to do this with those upon whom He puts any honor in His service.

You must not marvel if God should be pleased to bless you to the conversion of souls, that He should also make you sometimes smart. Remember that Paul, with all his grace, could not be without “a thorn in the flesh.” There must also be “a messenger of Satan to buffet you,” lest you should be exalted above measure, so may you learn to submit cheerfully to a discipline which, though painful to you, your heavenly Father knows to be wise!

Moreover, these fainting fits to which God’s servants are subject, *are profitable, not only to those who have them, but to others*. To compare small things with great, a foolish idea sometimes gets into the minds of our hearers, that surely the minister can never be much cast down. Young converts sometimes think that old saints can never know such contentions within, such doubtings, such humblings of spirit, as they feel.

Ah! but whether they are dwarfs or giants, the experience of Christian men is amazingly alike. There are lines of weakness in the creature which even grace does not efface. “When the peacock looks at his fair feathers,” says old Master Dyer, “he may afterwards look at his black feet,” and so, whenever the brightest Christian begins to be proud of his graces, there will be sure to be something about him which will remind others as well as himself that he is yet in the body.

I forget how many times it is that Ezekiel is called, in the book of his prophecy, “the son of man.” I counted them the other day, and I do not find the same title applied to any other prophet so often as it is to him. Why is this? Why, there was never another prophet who had such eagle wings as Ezekiel had, it was given to him to soar more loftily than any other, hence he is always called, “the son of man,” to show that he is but a man after all. Your highest people, your most elevated saints, are but sons of fallen Adam, touched with the same infirmities and weaknesses as their fellow creatures, and liable, unless grace prevents, to fall into the same sins as others fall into.

I think these are good and sufficient reasons why the strongest believers often experience the most oppressive weakness.

II. Now let us turn to a second thought, which is this—WHEN BELIEVERS DO HAVE FAINTING FITS, THEY WILL RECEIVE EXTRAORDINARY REFRESHMENTS.

Elijah had often been fed in a remarkable manner, ravens had ministered to his necessities at one time, and at another time an impoverished widow had boarded him, but on this occasion he is to be fed by an angel. The best refreshments are to be provided for him at the worst season, and he might well have said, “Thou hast kept the best wine until now, when I needed it the most.”

The food that he ate at Cherith had to be brought to him every morning and every evening, but the food which was given to him now lasted him for forty days and forty nights, and though the widow’s cruse did not fail, yet he needed constantly to apply to it, but in this case, one meal, or rather a double meal, was sufficient to last him during six weeks of journeying. He was supernaturally awakened, he found food convenient for him—a cake and a cruse of water all ready at his hand, and he had only to rise and take it.

Now, my dear brethren and sisters in Christ—for I now speak only to you—have you never found that in times when heart and flesh have both failed, you have been privileged to receive some special help from heaven? Sometimes it has come to you in the form of a *full assurance of your interest in Christ*.

Your heart was very heavy, the work you had before you seemed to be much too arduous for you, your spirit quailed before your enemies, the weight of your trouble was too much for you, but just then Jesus whispered softly into your ear that you were His. You had doubted before whether you really were Christ’s, but you could not doubt it any longer, the Spirit bore witness with your spirit that you were born of God, and you could—

*“Read your title clear,
To mansions in the skies.”*

It is singular how this assurance acts in two ways. It is the great cure for us when we are soaring too high. When Christ’s disciples had cast out devils, He said to them, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” And this too, is the cure for us when we fall too low. Mourn not over this, but still “rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” Many an old saint, sitting in a chimney corner under an accumulation of aches, and pains, and weaknesses, and sorrows, has sung—

*“When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.*

*Should earth against my soul engage,
And hellish darts be hurled,
Then I can smile at Satan’s rage,
And face a frowning world.”*

Bless God for the full assurance of faith, for it will yield you food in the strength of which you may go on for forty days and forty nights. May God give us to feed on it constantly! But sometimes He gives us the richest meal of it just when we are in our weakest state, and are ready to give up in despair.

We have known the Lord feed His people, sometimes, with another truth, namely, *the doctrine of His own greatness and grandeur*. A sight of the greatness of God is a very blessed stay to us under a sense of our littleness. There you lie, broken and bruised, like an insect that has been crushed. You look up, and the light flashes through the dark cloud, and you behold something of the greatness and the glory

of God, and you think, “What are my troubles? He can bear them. What are all my griefs? They are only as the small dust of the balance to Him. Why should I faint or grow weary when He upon whom I lean faints not, neither is weary? Underneath me are His everlasting arms. He is mighty, though I am a thing of nought. He is wise, though I am lost, and bewildered, and foolish. He is faithful, though I am doubting and trembling.”

“The more His glories strike our eye,”—

the less apt shall we be to die of despair, we shall feed upon this food as Elijah did upon his cake baked upon the coals, and like him, we shall go in the strength of it for forty days.

Sometimes too, we have known the blessedness of feeding upon *the assurance that the cause of God will be ultimately triumphant*. I remember when, like a broken, bruised, and worthless thing, I seemed set aside from Christian service, and from my work for God, which I loved. It seemed to me as though I should never return again to preach the Word, I marveled how the work of my hands under God would fare, and my spirit was overwhelmed within me. I made diligent search after comfort, but found none, my soul took counsel within herself, and so increased her woes, but no light came.

I shall never forget the moment when, on a sudden, these words came to me, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [See sermon #101, The Exaltation of Christ. This was Mr. Spurgeon’s first sermon after the Surrey Gardens accident. The full story of that memorable period is told in C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Vol. II, Chapter I, “The Great Catastrophe at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall”].

At once I thought, “What matters it if I, the soldier, fall upon the battlefield, if my great Captain is safe? JEHOVAH reigns, Christ is exalted.” Then I seemed to look upon my own being set aside, my shame, my reproach, my death, or anything else that might befall me, as not being worth a moment’s thought, because the King stood yonder and the blood-red flag waved in triumph. O God, Thy truth must conquer in the end, Thy foes must fly. What if they gain some petty advantage here and there along the line? What if they do make a breach here and there in the bulwarks of our Zion? They shall fly like chaff before the wind in the day when Thou appearest, the battle is Thine, O Lord, and Thou wilt deliver them into our hand ere long!

Let the ultimate triumph of the truth solace you when you are discouraged because you have seemed to labor in vain, and spend your strength for nought. Be of good cheer, the Conqueror who comes with dyed garments from Bozrah, is still in the midst of His church. This cake baked on the coals has often given food to poor fainting Elijahs.

A conviction too, of the sympathy of Jesus Christ with them has often been very dainty food and a precious cordial to mourning spirits. This is, perhaps, the very first doctrine we teach the bereaved and sick saints. We tell them that “in all their afflictions he was afflicted.” And probably there is no verse that is sung oftener, and with greater sweetness, than this one—

*“How bitter that cup no heart can conceive,
Which He drank quite up, that sinners might live!
His way was much rougher and darker than mine;
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?”*

It makes pain so glorious when you think that the very same pain shoots through Him as through you, that there is not so much pain truly in the finger as there is in the head, that the head is indeed the true seat of all the sensitiveness. It is not so much Christ’s people who suffer, as it is Christ Himself suffering in them. Does it not make the cross glorious when you bear it with the thought that it is Christ’s cross you are carrying? To suffer poverty for Christ’s sake is a very different thing from suffering poverty in the abstract. To be despised for the Gospel’s sake is a different thing from being

despised for any other reason, for to be reproached for Christ is honor, and to suffer for Christ is pleasure.

A mother will sit up night after night to nurse her darling child, she would not do it for anyone else for any money you could offer her, and though she grows very weary, she goes to her work again, and does for her child what she would not, and probably could not, do for any other child. So some of us would do for love what we would not think of doing for gain, and when we know that we are doing and suffering for Christ, and feel that Christ is with us in it all, it becomes a very blessed cordial, and we—

“Rejoice in deep distress,”—

since Jesus Christ is with us.

And how often has God given much comfort to His people, when they were ready to give all up, *by a vision of heaven*? Did you ever have such a vision? Softly will it sometimes steal over your spirit, especially in severe sickness, when heaviness and uneasiness seem to bring you to the very gates of the grave. You do not hear the bells of heaven with your ears, nor do stray notes of angels’ harps salute you, nor do you see the white-robed hosts with your natural eyes, but your soul sees and hears it all. God sometimes brings His people into “the land of Beulah” before they fairly reach it in the order in which John Bunyan puts it in his allegory. Some of us have been to the very gates of heaven, we have had such foretastes of heaven that we feel that we can now fight the fight, and cheerfully wait—

“Our threescore years and ten,”—

if the Lord pleases to spare us so long, because the crown at the end is so glorious, and that we can journey through the wilderness because the Canaan is so worthy of all that we can do or suffer that we may enter it.

Beloved, a vision of Jesus Christ and a vision of heaven will be enough to solace the most downcast among you, and when you fain would hang your harp upon the willows, if Jesus Christ shall appear to you, and His Father shall smile upon you, and His Spirit shall actively work upon your hearts, and heaven’s gate shall be opened to you, then will you snatch up your harp, and wake it to the sweetest melodies in praise of sovereign grace. You Elijahs who are now saying, “Let me die,” change your note, for there is a cake baked on the coals provided for you, so do arise and eat it.

III. Let us observe, in the third place, that WHENEVER GOD THUS GIVES TO HIS CHILDREN VERY REMARKABLE ENJOYMENTS, IT IS IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY GO ON IN THE STRENGTH OF THOSE ENJOYMENTS FOR A LONG TIME.

Elijah was not fed that he might get strong, and then waste his strength. There are no sinecures in God’s service. All His true servants are real workmen, and when they have strength given to them by Him, it is not that they may show what fine fellows they are, but that they may toil on in their Master’s cause.

The soldier is a smart looking fellow on parade in days of peace—and long may it be ere he shall have cause to do anything more than show himself at such times—but God’s soldiers are always on active service, and as sure as ever the Master gives them a double round of ammunition, He means them to fire it all. If ever He gives them a new sword, it is because they will soon need it, and whenever He is pleased to furnish them with fresh armor, it is because He knows that they will require the sacred panoply. There are no superfluities in the provisions of God’s grace.

What had Elijah to do? Having fed upon this angels’ food, *he had to go a long solitary journey*. I wonder whether you can imagine it—a journey of forty days and forty nights! It does not seem to me, from what I gather from the story, that he ever stopped, certainly he did not stop to take refreshments, but went right away into the wilderness, having probably left his servant at Beersheba the whole time. He never saw the face of man all the while. He fasted more wonderfully than Moses did, who fasted on

the mountain in peace and quietness, this mysterious prophet fasted, and at the same time he was taking giant strides in the lonely wilderness, startling the beasts of prey, treading the unfrequented tracts of the wild goats and the gazelles with ever onward foot, on through the day's burning heat, and the night's black shade, never pausing for forty days and forty nights!

A strange march was that, but sometimes God calls His people to something very much like it. Strange, weird-like, and solitary is your soul, and nobody can walk with you where you have to go, you have to take strides that will suit no one else. You have to go a way that has not been trodden heretofore by any others. The Master has called you to special suffering, if not to special service, you have no pioneer, and no companion.

I suppose every person, who is called to serve God in a remarkable manner, or to suffer for Him in a particular way, must have noticed the solitariness of his own life. Do not tell me about solitude being only in the wilderness, a man may have plenty of company there, the worst solitude is that which a man may have among millions of his fellow creatures. Look at that solitude of Moses. When Moses had his heaviest cares upon him, with whom could he hold any real communion? With the seventy elders? As well might an eagle have stooped to have communion with so many sparrows. They were far beneath him, they had not hearts large enough to commune with the great-souled Moses.

You will say, perhaps, that Aaron might have done so. Ay, truly, a brother's heart is a very cheering one when it beats to the same tune as your own, but Aaron was a man of altogether different spirit from Moses, and nobody would think of comparing the two men. Moses is like some of those colossal figures that are cut in the Egyptian rocks, or that stand amidst the ruins of Karnak, he seems to have been one of those great spirits of the grand olden time before the stature of men had declined, and he is all alone. He bears the people on his bosom, and throughout his life is a solitary man.

Such too, was Elijah. Now, perhaps you will have special feasting upon Christ because in your trial or in your labor you will have to learn that there is a secret you cannot tell to any but your God, that there is a bitterness with which no other heart can intermeddle, that there are heights and depths through which you will have to pass, and will have to pass alone. Do not wonder, dear friends, if these words should come true to you in days to come. Do not marvel if that verse we sometimes sing should happen to be suitable to you on this quiet, peaceful evening—

*“We should suspect some danger nigh,
When we perceive too much delight.”*

If God feeds us with angels' food, He means us to do more than man's work.

But I meant you to notice, in the next place, that whilst Elijah was thus fed that he might go a long and lonely journey, that *he was sent on that journey that he might be brought into more sympathy with God than before*. Why did he have to journey “forty days and forty nights into Horeb the mount of God”? It is said that it was not more than eighty miles, and certainly does not appear to have been a hundred. Such a long time was not necessary for the distance, why, therefore, did Elijah take it?

Do you not see that it is a day for a year? “Forty years long,” saith JEHOVAH, “was I grieved with this generation” in the wilderness. Forty days and nights, therefore, must the Lord's servant walk over the very tracks where Israel had pitched their tents, and God seemed to say to him, “O Elijah, dost thou lose thy temper, and turn away from Israel, and ask to die, when I had to bear with My people forty years, and yet, notwithstanding that, they now inherit the goodly land, and have come to Lebanon?”

Beloved, the servants of God must frequently meet with ingratitude, and unkind treatment, and harsh words, and cruel speeches from those whom they try to serve, and sometimes God's own people are a greater plague to God's ministers than are all the rest of the world besides. Well, what of that? Does not the Lord seem to say, “Now I will teach you what My compassions are, I will teach you what My patience must be, you shall have forty days' walking in the wilderness to make you understand

something of what I felt when, for forty years, I bore with the ill manners, and rebellions, and idolatries, of this crooked and perverse people”?

Is it not a grand thing, my brethren and sisters, to be made to have sympathy with God? I do not think the most of Christians understand this—to be made to feel as God felt, so that you are enabled, as it were, to see things from God’s standpoint, and to begin to understand why He is angry with the wicked, and to magnify that matchless grace which bears so long with the sons of men.

It may possibly happen, my brethren, that the Master has been feeding you upon some special and dainty food at His table, or under the ministry, or in earnest prayer, or in communion, or in meditation, in order that, in the future, you may have greater sympathy with Himself by treading, in your measure, the same path that He trod in years long gone by.

There is always a special reason when there comes a special mercy, and so, to conclude, I ask you to note that *the Lord gave His servant this special benefit because He intended to give him a very special rebuke*. “What doest thou here, Elijah?” was not the sort of language that Elijah had been accustomed to hear from his God. He could use such language himself to his fellow men, as he did when he spoke to Ahab, but he was not accustomed to hear such words spoken to him by God.

Softer sentences had hitherto greeted his ear, but now God is about to rebuke him for running away from his work, for playing the coward, and for setting an example of unbelief, but before He rebukes him, He supplies all his needs, and gives him forty days’ strength.

The Lord does not chasten His children when they are weak and sickly, “without,” as one says, “sustaining them with one hand while he smites them with the other.” He will give you comforting grace as well as the privilege of chastisement. You cannot do without the rod, but you shall be enabled, on the strength of the meat which He will give you, to bear up under it without your spirit utterly fainting.

Possibly God may have in store for some of us a special rebuke. He may intend to make some thundering passage in His Word come with terrific power to our souls. He may mean to lay us upon a bed of sickness, and therefore, now, by giving us strengthening food, He is preparing us for it, that even when in the furnace we may be enabled to sing His praise.

I leave these thoughts with those of you who know the way of the wilderness. Those of you who do not will not care much about them, but I may pray God that the sinner, who knows nothing of these faintings, may be made to faint utterly till his soul dies within him with spiritual despair, and when he so dieth, then the Lord who killeth will make him alive. When you have no power left, if you can throw yourself beneath the shadow of the cross, though your flesh may make you sleep there as Elias did under the juniper tree, yet you shall hear a voice which shall bid you arise, and in the great atonement of the Savior you shall find a cake baked on what hot coals I will not now undertake to say.

You shall find it such food to the weary spirit that when you have partaken of it, poor sinner, you shall dare to go to the mount of God, even to Horeb, and face the terrible law of God and ask, “Who shall lay anything to my charge?” Feeding on Jesus, mysteriously sustained by trusting in the efficacy of His precious blood, you shall go on till you shall see God face to face in His holy mount in glory, in the strength of Him who said, “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”

God bless every one of us, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 143

Verses 1-3. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.*

This is a very graphic description of David's sorrow, and those who have ever come under the power of Satan so as to be crushed in spirit, and see all their hopes blighted and withered, know what David meant when he penned these words. Only think of a soul dwelling in darkness like a body that has been long dead, and shut up in the grave.

4. *Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.*

What a sad expression that is! It would be difficult to bring out all its meaning, "My heart within me is desolate"—lonely, deserted, desponding, despairing, almost destroyed.

5. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.*

This is a gracious exercise which tends greatly to the comfort of mourners, yet it does not always succeed, for God's works cannot satisfy us if God hides Himself from us.

6. *I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.*

"My soul seems scarcely such a living thing as a thirsty stag panting for the cooling stream; but as the parched earth, that cannot call to Thee, and yet doth gape with open mouth as if she silently implored the rain, so is it with me." God sends the dew to the grass which cannot call to Him for it, then how much more will He send the dew of His grace to us who do cry to Him for it, and with anguish thirst after it!

7-8. *Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.*

What a dead "lift" it is sometimes! Yet we must not let our soul lie in the gutter. By God's help, we must lift it up, and the nearer the soul is lifted up to God, the more it comes into the light, and the more sure it is yet to obtain its liberty.

9-10. *Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; [See sermon #1519, At School] for thou art my God: thy spirit is good,—*

"Make my spirit good!"

10-11. *Lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake:*

Do not these prayers fit you, my brothers and sisters? Do you not feel as if you were being taught how to pray by the reading of this psalm? I think it must be so at least with some of you.

11-12. *For thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.*

We cannot join in the prayers in this verse just as it stands, for we live in another dispensation, in which we are taught to pray *for* our enemies, not against them, but as far as this verse relates to our spiritual enemies, our sins, and temptations, and Satanic foes, we do pray that they may be utterly cut off, and that the very name of them may be blotted out from under heaven. May God hear that prayer, and answer it, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.